



Sustaining Seattle: Our Defining Challenge



City of Seattle
Office of Sustainability and Environment

Dear Citizen:

Each Spring, with Seattle in full bloom, I find myself reflecting on this spectacular piece of the Earth we inhabit, celebrating its beauty and its bounty, and reaffirming my commitment to protecting and enhancing our “natural capital” — for ourselves, and for future generations. I feel tremendous pride for all we’ve tried and accomplished in this city and region. Time after time we’ve demonstrated both our ability and our willingness to find unique, homegrown solutions to formidable challenges. We chose conservation over nuclear power. We chose recycling over incineration. We chose to ban logging in the Cedar River watershed, and restore 40% of the logging roads there to natural conditions. More recently, we set aggressive new goals for ourselves: to double energy and water conservation over the next 10 years; to use state-of-the-art “green building” practices in all new City buildings over 5,000 square feet; and to meet all new energy demand without net increase in climate-altering greenhouse gas emissions.

But despite these and many other efforts, in 2001 we find ourselves inundated with evidence that we still are losing ground. The salmon in our state and region are disappearing, due to deteriorating habitat conditions in our watersheds, and a host of other factors. Our air quality is uncomfortably close to exceeding standards for some pollutants, due in large part to increased emissions from motor vehicles. And rapid population and economic growth, combined with global warming-induced climate change and other factors, are pushing hard against the limits of our energy and water supplies.

To me, these are clear indications that we are chipping away at the ecological foundation on which our city’s long-term health and wealth depend. We are tugging, unknowingly, on the plug of our own life-support system.

These are warning signs, and a call for vigilance. When it comes to environmental stewardship, there is no time for resting on laurels. And the City must continue to lead the charge — especially now, with federal government leadership on these issues appearing to dwindle. We have numerous and frequent opportunities to improve our own practices, to lead by example, to leverage broader change, and to help create the kind of city we want for ourselves, and for our children and grandchildren. We must not — and will not — squander these opportunities. We must continue to produce and deliver essential services such as energy, water, mobility, and recreation in the fairest, most resource-efficient, most environmentally responsible way possible. We must promote mindful consumption of those services through education and incentives that send the right message to our citizens and customers. And we must continue to use the power of our purse to transform markets and mindsets.

I want our City to be a laboratory of leadership, developing and modeling ‘best management practices’ for all our operations and services. I want us to be the global epicenter of municipal entrepreneurship. My goal is simple, but bold: I want Seattle to be the “greenest” City government in the world — the most water-efficient, the most energy-efficient, the least polluting, in short, the most “sustainable.”

There are those who still view environmental stewardship and economic development as opposing goals. I am not among them. Especially here in Seattle, our best economic development strategy is to build an environmentally sustainable city. Sustainability is about realigning our human economy with the natural systems on which it depends. It’s about rebuilding our communities — and our *sense* of community. It’s about saving what’s special about our city. And it’s our next great challenge.

Fortunately, we Seattleites have a long history of rising to these challenges. We have a talent for transforming “crises” into opportunities for innovation and leadership. It is time for another such transformation to take place.

Sincerely,



Paul Schell
City of Seattle Mayor



Our Proud, Green History

Seattleites have understood for a long time that a healthy environment is key to our economic, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. For decades, environmental stewardship has been a high priority for citizens, and for City government. And it's clear our collective commitment has paid off:

- We developed one of the most innovative, and most emulated, recycling programs in the world. The percentage of our solid waste that is recycled increased from 20% in 1981 to about 50% in 1997, and our goal is to recycle 60% by 2008.
- Our energy conservation programs are among the best in the country. We saved approximately 80 average megawatts in the last 20 years — which with today's skyrocketing energy prices saves us about \$1 million a day. We have committed to doubling our annual energy savings over the next 10 years and to meeting all new energy demand with no net increases in greenhouse gas emissions.
- Thanks to an aggressive water conservation program, regional water consumption in 1997 was the same as in 1980, despite 20% population growth. Since 1989, per capita water consumption dropped by 20%. And the City's goal is to double those savings over the next 10 years.



- We have been continuously reducing the environmental impacts of the City's own facilities and operations. For example, we are eliminating the use of the most hazardous herbicides and insecticides on City property, and are well on our way to meeting our goal of reducing the City's overall use of pesticides by 30% by 2002.
- The City has invested heavily in cultivating the next generation of environmental stewards, through state-of-the-art environmental education programs in our

public schools, at our major parks (Carkeek Park, Discovery Park, and Camp Long) and at the Cedar River Watershed Education Center. In the coming years, we will be building the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center in the Skagit River watershed, and expanding our environmental education programs into 24 community centers located throughout the city. These are just a few samples of our success.

The laws of nature supercede human laws, and ultimately they will impose themselves on us whether we want them to or not. In realizing this, we can make a choice: to continue to follow unsustainable practices for which we will pay a staggering price in the long run, or to begin to profit now from smart investments that take into account the natural infrastructure of which we are a part.

Karl-Henrik Robert
"The Natural Step: A Framework for achieving Sustainability in Our Organizations"

What Is "Sustainability?"



"Sustainability," is one of those words that mean different things to different people. For our city, it boils down to these six concepts:

- ***Saving what's special.*** Sustainability is not some remote, esoteric issue talked about at universities and think tanks; it's about saving what's special right here in our city: our magnificent, fertile surroundings; our urban forest and creeks, our distinct and vibrant neighborhoods, our civility. It's about preserving the things we love most about Seattle, the things that bring us pride and joy, the things we want to hand down to our children and grandchildren.

- ***Maintaining our edge.*** Our natural setting — its sheer beauty and the economic, recreational, and spiritual benefits we derive from it — is something that sets us apart from other urban areas. It's one of the main reasons that people and businesses want to locate here. In short, it's a major component of our competitive advantage as a city, something we would be foolish to squander. Sustainability is about nurturing our advantage, and enhancing our edge.

- ***Making connections.*** It is becoming increasingly clear that the necessary conditions for the well-being of our city — economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social justice — are inextricably intertwined, not the separate bailiwicks of

separate City departments. We can't be a healthy city without all three — and we can't have one, over the long haul, without the other two.

When we pursue one goal without sufficient consideration of the other two, at best we miss opportunities for creative and integrative solutions; at worst, we create a bigger problem elsewhere. Sustainability is about making these connections, and understanding the whole system in which we're

operating, as we make decisions about where, how, and how much to develop our city.

- ***Doing the right thing.*** Sustainability is about fairness over time. It's about meeting our social and economic wants and needs, but in a way that doesn't leave any segment of our population behind, and doesn't undermine the ability of future generations to meet their needs. As syndicated columnist Deborah Mathis wrote recently: "The politicians told us it would be immoral to leave future generations with a fat national debt... What kind of sin would it be to leave them with a dirty, dysfunctional, and perhaps dangerous planet?"

- ***Saving money.*** There is a lot of money to be saved and made by applying new technologies and designing new processes that use our limited and increasingly costly natural resources more efficiently, eliminate waste, and prevent pollution. The Portland-based Center for Watershed and Community Health recently studied 108 firms and organizations in Oregon and Washington that implemented one or more "sustainability measures," such as applying energy-efficient design, installing new technologies, and using non-toxic materials. These projects resulted in cost savings of nearly \$56 million, and paid for themselves in less than two years, *and* accrued enormous environmental benefits in terms of reduced consumption of water, energy, and fuel, reduced air and water pollution, and reduced solid and hazardous waste generation and disposal. The bottom line is clear: sustainability is a good business.

- ***Saving ourselves.*** Ultimately, sustainability is not about saving money, salmon, or the Earth; it's about saving ourselves. Nature is not some separate, unattached entity that we drive to and go hiking through on weekends; it's our life-support system.

Soon (I would estimate within a few decades) we will realize collectively what each of us already knows individually: It's cheaper to take care of something — a roof, a car, a planet — than to let it decay and try to fix it later.

Paul Hawken
"Natural Capitalism"

Sustainability and the City

Cities, where people and economic activities are concentrated, hold a key to sustainability. Our city is particularly well poised to meet this challenge. We are one of the wealthiest, best-educated, and most conservation-minded cities in the world. Our elected officials are committed to environmental stewardship and sustainable development. We have a solid foundation of clear policies and successful programs on which to build. And the nature that encompasses and shapes our city provides a constant reminder of what's at stake.

Seattle City government, because of its size, mission, and diverse functions, is uniquely positioned to

provide leadership on the path toward sustainability.

As a large employer and landowner, a fleet operator and building manager, a major consumer of goods and services, a regulator, and a service provider, we have numerous opportunities, each day, to adopt more sustainable practices ourselves, and to influence choices made by others. In particular, we can influence those from whom we purchase goods and services, and those to whom we provide essential services such as electrical energy, water, recreation, waste management, mobility, and affordable housing.

The Office of Sustainability and Environment was created to help the City take full advantage of these opportunities.



What should constitute the beginning of a truly post-industrial age? Only fundamental shifts in how the economic system affects the larger systems within which it resides – namely, society and nature... We can either continue moving ever more rapidly in the direction that cannot be sustained, or we can change. Perhaps no time in history has afforded greater possibilities for a collective change in direction.

Peter Senge & Goran Carstedt
"Innovating Our Way to the
Next Industrial Revolution"

Introducing OSE

In 2000, the Mayor and the City Council merged the City's Office of Environmental Management and the Seattle Urban Sustainability Initiative, to form the Office of Sustainability and Environment (OSE). By integrating these two programs, Seattle's elected leaders recognized the need to



understand, and manage for, the linkages between the city's long-term economic, environmental, and social health. They recognized the importance of this mission by placing the new organization in the Mayor's Office, giving it greater visibility and closer proximity to decision-makers.

OSE will work with City departments and elected officials to explore, identify, and capitalize on the City's key "sustainability leverage points," carefully targeting changes in City policies and programs that promote more sustainable practices, both within City government and in the community at-large. More specifically, OSE will focus on three interrelated goals:

- Work with City departments to *continuously reduce the environmental impacts of City facilities, operations, and services*, through the continued implementation of the City's Environmental Management Program (EMP). This

includes strong emphasis on increasing water and energy efficiency in City operations and facilities, increasing the use of sustainable building practices in the design and construction of new City facilities, reducing the City's use of pesticides and other hazardous chemicals, and increasing the City's use of sustainable, environmentally friendly and sustainable products.

- Work with City staff, department directors, and elected officials to *better evaluate and integrate long-term economic, environmental, and social considerations into City plans, actions, and expenditures*. This will include communications and intensive awareness-building programs, and a transition, over time, from the City's existing environmental management system to a "sustainability management system" that focuses on the City's "triple bottom line" of economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social justice.



- Work primarily with City departments, but also with nonprofit organizations and the business community, to *identify and pursue opportunities to accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices throughout the community and region*.

Sustainability in Action!

Sustainability is not some meaningless buzzword bouncing off the walls of countless conference halls and boardrooms. Nor is it some lofty, arcane, and unattainable goal. It's people who care, work together, pool ideas, and inspire. They find innovative and integrative ways to save what's special about their community and city. And it's happening all over Seattle. A few examples:

- **Cultivating Communities:** This partnership between Friends of P-Patch (a nonprofit affiliate of the City's P-Patch Program) and the Seattle Housing Authority develops organic gardens and community-supported agriculture (CSA) opportunities in low-income housing communities throughout the city. There now are 10 such gardens in four low-income housing communities, providing gardening space for about 120 people. This innovative program provides food to low-income families, promotes sustainable gardening, and builds community.
- **Growing Vine Street Project:** In Belltown, one of the fastest-growing sections of downtown Seattle, a diverse group of residents is busy transforming eight blocks of Vine Street into the city's first "green street." This grassroots project will feature an alternative stormwater management system to channel rainwater through a biological filtration system and directly into Elliott Bay, rather than continue piping it to the West Point Treatment Plant. This project, supported by the City's Neighborhood Matching Fund and Seattle Public Utilities, diverts water from the wastewater treatment system, builds awareness and appreciation for both the urban environment and Belltown's history, and beautifies and unifies the neighborhood.
- **Cascade Rain Harvest Project:** In the Cascade Neighborhood just north of downtown Seattle, users of the neighborhood P-Patch are meeting more than a quarter of their water needs with rainwater that is collected on a nearby roof, sent to barrels at the high end of the garden, and piped to faucets throughout the garden for irrigation. This system, which was designed and constructed by neighborhood volunteers with support from the City's Seattle Public Utilities, reduces water use, builds community, and educates gardeners and passers-by about sustainable water management.
- **Way to Go!** This innovative experiment asks participating families to park their "extra" car for six weeks and track the choices they make and the miles of driving they reduce by using one less car. Participants walked more, rode their bikes, used the bus and better planned the car trips they did make. As a result they reduced air pollution, traffic congestion, and stress, and saved money. Some of the families are now selling their second car.
- **Neighborhood Power Project:** This project provides practical help with water and energy conservation measures in homes and businesses and the implementation of neighborhood plans. A partnership between several City departments, the participating neighborhoods, and the Business Resource Venture, this initiative builds community, instills a conservation ethic, and saves money for citizens, businesses, and the City.



For this generation of northwesterners, the defining challenge is to redirect the deep current of growth in ways that enable its benefits to accrue while deflecting its costs. More simply stated, our calling is to achieve sustainability: an economy and way of life in which both people and nature flourish, a culture that can last.

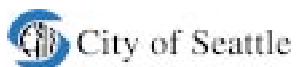
Northwest
Environment
Watch

"This Place on
Earth"



Probably the most challenging task facing humanity today is the creation of a shared vision of a sustainable and desirable society, one that can provide permanent prosperity within the biophysical constraints of the real world in a way that is fair and equitable to all of humanity, to other species, and to future generations.

Robert Costanza



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